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Connection and Escape: Washtenaw Youth Center Library System

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From: Harleigh Seyffert

Subject: Final Report

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For the grant I received through the University of Michigan Library System, I was able to work with the Washtenaw Youth Detention Center to revamp their library system. I have been a volunteer at the Youth Detention Center for the past year and a half as a leader of a weekly book club for girls. Through my experiences there, I was amazed at the work the staff and volunteers were doing with the kids. The staff really worked hard to engage the kids and make sure their education was continued and benefitted by their time at the center. Reading and literacy is a big component of this, and the staff at the Youth Center does a lot to promote literacy. One place where I saw a need was the library system there. The books were, old, worn-out, and outdated. With the help of the staff at the Youth Center, I submitted a proposal to buy new books for their library. With this money, we were able to completely overhaul their present library and buy new books to reflect the diverse population of kids at the center. We bought books that the kids requested, and built up their collection.

A big challenge at the Youth Detention Center is interesting the kids in reading, especially if their reading level is not at a very high level. We were able to work with a Children's Library specialist to find books that are both interesting, but cover all reading levels.

This project strengthened the bond between the Washtenaw Youth Detention Center and the University of Michigan by providing support for a real need. So many Michigan students volunteer at the Youth Center, and now we've been able to support them more. Now, more students can volunteer at the center, helping to promote literacy, because there are more materials there. As well, by purchasing books that reflect the diverse population at the Youth Center, we are able to celebrate the diversity of the Youth Center. The kids there can find books that showcase different people, places, and cultures.

For the future, we will continue using the funds to buy books (we've already purchased over 200!), as well as working on a cataloguing system to keep the books organized in the library.

I greatly benefitted from working more closely with the Washtenaw Youth Center to get this project going. Before, I was just a book club volunteer, but after this project, I've gotten a deeper understanding of how to make a more long-lasting difference. I have a stronger bond with the Youth Center, and now can continue volunteering there and get to take part in the great work they are doing. This project was greatly benefitted by the support staff at the Michigan Library System. Our Children's Librarian Angie Oehrli was amazing at recommending books that are great at interesting kids in reading. She pointed us in the direction of books that celebrate diversity, and helped us invest in different types of books that would be good for the population there. The kids

requested some graphic novels, and Angie helped us accomplish that, and more. Plus, Angie has been invaluable in her advice on a new cataloguing system for the library, which is presently a big issue at the Youth Center. With her help, we are working on a new system that will fit their needs well. A big thank you to everyone at the Washtenaw Youth Center, especially Cheyenne Turner for her guidance, support, direction, and passion in the project. We are also very grateful for Angie Oehrli and her knowledge and guidance in this project.

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